**08 The Media**

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Many journalists worry that the decline of the traditional newspaper industry is a threat to the quality of American democracy.

**What We Learned**

***1. How is the media landscape in the United States changing?*** Private businesses, often large corporations, own and operate most media sources in the United States. Many mainstream media outlets, especially newspapers, newsmagazines, and the network evening news, have been in decline for years, at least in terms of circulation and ratings. In contrast, the new media, which is a term used to refer to alternative media sources, such as the Internet, cable television, and satellite radio, are growing in importance. A major goal of news media outlets is to attract as large an audience as possible. The mainstream media seek to draw an audience by focusing on stories with entertainment value, such as crime stories and celebrity news. Other media outlets try to build a niche audience by targeting audiences based on political philosophy, issue focus, or religious values.

***2. What is the relationship between the government and the media?*** The Constitution guarantees freedom of the press. As a result, the news media enjoy broad freedom to report the news, even news that is critical of the government. The FCC regulates the broadcast media, but not cable TV, satellite radio, or the Internet. A number of controversies arise over the relationship between government and the media, including the issue of whether reporters should be required to reveal the names of confidential sources to the government. Many states have adopted shield laws, which are statutes that protect journalists from being forced to disclose confidential information in a legal proceeding.

***3. How do politicians attempt to influence the tone and content of media coverage?*** Campaign organizations attempt to manage news coverage to present the candidates they favor in the most positive light with sound bites and visual images all designed to supported a theme of the day. Once in office, elected officials try to manipulate media coverage to build support for their policy initiatives and eventual reelection campaigns.

***4. Are the media biased?*** Although major newspapers, broadcast television news, and the major cable news networks pride themselves on their commitment to objective journalism, most Americans believe that the media are biased. Research suggests that media sources may indeed play favorites, but scholars have no evidence that news coverage affects election outcomes.

***5. What is the role of the media in the policymaking process?*** Political scientists say that the press plays a signaling role in that it alerts the public to important developments as they happen. The media also influence the policymaking process through framing, which is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy.

**Tips for Success**

**Your professor is your friend:** Make sure you know the name and e-mail address of your professor so you can contact him or her if you have questions.

**Key Terms**

**Attack Journalism**

an approach to news reporting in which journalists take an adversarial attitude toward candidates and elected officials

**Broadcast Media**

television, radio, and the Internet

**Fairness Doctrine**

an FCC regulation repealed in 1987 that required broadcasters to present controversial issues of public importance in “an honest, equal, and balanced manner.”

**Federal Communications Commission (FCC)**

government agency that regulates the broadcast media using the public airwaves

**Framing**

the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy

**New Media**

a term used to refer to alternative media sources, such as the Internet, cable television, and satellite radio Normative Analysis a method of study that is based on certain values

**Objective Journalism**

a style of news reporting that focuses on facts rather than opinion, and presents all sides of controversial issues

**Print Media**

newspapers and magazines

**Shield Law**

a statute that protects journalists from being forced to disclose confidential information in a legal proceeding

**Signaling Role**

a term that refers to the accepted responsibility of the media to alert the public to important developments as they happen

**Sound Bite**

a short phrase taken from a candidate's speech by the news media for use on newscasts

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks for both political figures and the public of the decline of traditional newspapers and the rise of new media?

2. Should the federal government regulate content on the Internet the way it regulates content broadcast over the public airways?

3. Do you feel the media are biased? In what ways?

4. What are some of the ways that Presidents Bush and Obama tried to manipulate the way the press covered events during their presidencies?

5. What role does the media play in the policymaking process? Is this an appropriate role?

**Interactive Activity**

**Video: YouTube Politics**

In the 2008 presidential election, candidate and winner Barack Obama changed the campaign and media landscape across the United States. His aggressive and skillful use of Web 2.0 (i.e., the Internet, YouTube, and social networking sites) for campaign and fund-raising purposes raised the bar for presidential hopefuls in the years to come. Social Media have enabled candidates and policymakers to break their dependence on the traditional media outlets and to target diverse markets and audiences with impressive precision. Moreover, candidates and policymakers can exchange broadcasting for more cost-effective narrowcasting. Candidates can sharpen their messages and image to fit whatever audiences they are trying to reach. Does Obama's campaign represent a radical break from the past? How were presidents and presidential candidates already making use of the media? Are there disadvantages to relying on new media? As you watch the video, examine how Obama uses the web to reach the nation.

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